

New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1948

Volume IX, Number 25

Rachel W. Coffin, Editor

Week of November 29, 1948

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NEW YORK SUN	NEW YORK STAR
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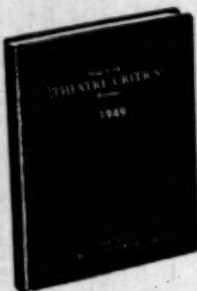
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"The Silver Whistle"

New York Post

NOVEMBER 26, 1948

Jose Ferrer Triumphs In an Engaging Play

By RICHARD WATTS Jr.

With a bow in the direction of William Saroyan, Omar Khayyam and Rostand, Robert E. McEnroe has written an engaging fable about a modern Cyrano in an old peoples' home, which the Theatre Guild put on at the Biltmore Wednesday night. It is called "The Silver Whistle," and it is an amusing, disarming and oddly endearing little comedy in its own right, despite occasional lapses from grace. Since it also has Jose Ferrer in the leading role, and Mr. Ferrer gives the performance toward which his versatile career has long been headed, the result is something decidedly to be cherished.

As a romantic tramp with the gift of eloquence and imagination, who talks of adventure, far places and love potions and claims to be 77 years old, Mr. Ferrer has the sort of part than can mean a lifetime of success to the proper actor. As Elwood P. Dowd was to Frank Fay or, going back into ancient history, Rip

Van Winkle was to Joseph Jefferson, this vagabond called Oliver Erwerter could well be to Mr. Ferrer. He can be sly, humorous, silver-tongued, outrageous, dashing and loveable. But, although it is an irresistible role in its paean to man's longing to be carefree and boldly irresponsible, he never falls back on its easy appeal.

Creative Acting

Instead, he brings to it such style, grace, humor, spirit and imagination that his performance becomes one of the really notable characterizations of the recent theatre. There is in his work no sign of a knowing actor relying for success on the inherent charm and attractiveness of his role. On the contrary, he uses the instinctively engaging quality of the part as a springboard for a portrayal that is an almost perfect example of how creative an actor's work can be. The author has provided him with the fine outline of a character, but Mr. Ferrer has filled it out until it assumes a kind of comic magnificence.

Whimsy is a perilous thing for a playwright to attempt, and there are times when Mr. McEnroe threatens to be whimsical to the point of roguishness. His desire to write in the spirit of the three masters he has taken as his collective model is sometimes greater than his present

capacity seems to warrant. There are moments when he is more literal-minded than is necessary, and a second or two when he verges on tastelessness. Nevertheless, his tale of the merry tramp whose lies and fantasies bring a new life to the sad and beaten inmates of the old peoples' home has humor, freshness, imagination and rare sweetness.

Doro Merande

Although it is Mr. Ferrer's delightful performance that gives "The Silver Whistle" its chief glory, there are some other especially winning portrayals. Doro Merande, for example, possesses one of the fine individual talents of the American theatre and has never failed to be a joy to all beholders. As a cynical old lady, determined not to be taken in by anybody, she is as wonderful as she was in Saroyan's enchanting "Love's Old Sweet Song," and I can think of few higher tributes. Then, too, William Lynn is perfect as an ancient fellow who still dreams of himself as quite a card among the women.

Kathleen Comegys plays a coy and flirtatious inmate with engaging freshness, and so does Frances Brandt as a merrily bibulous old girl. There is an excellent characterization by Robert Carroll of a stuffy young minister who unbends before the vagabond's spell, and Eleanor

"THE SILVER WHISTLE"

Play by Robert E. McEnroe; staged by Paul Crabtree; settings and lighting by Herbert Brodwin; costumes by Ernest Straga; production under the supervision of Theresa Helburn and Lawrence Langner; presented by the Theatre Guild at the Biltmore Theatre, Wednesday evening, November 24, 1948. The cast:

Mr. Erwerter	William Lynn
Mrs. Hammer	Doro Merande
Miss Headley	Frances Brandt
Miss Tripp	Eleanor Wilson
Reverend Watson	Robert Carroll
Mrs. Sampler	Kathleen Comegys
Mr. Dross	Joe Marchetti
Mr. Cherry	Barton Malory
Oliver Erwerter	Jose Ferrer
Barnett	George Mathews
Father Shay	Charles Hart
Mr. Beach	Edward Platt
Mr. Ruddy	Charles Kuhn
Policeman	Chase Suttler
Shop	Lawrence Fletcher

SYNOPSIS: The entire action of the play takes place in the garden of a church adjoining an old people's home. Act I, Scene I—Afternoon. Scene 2—Evening of the same day. Act II—Evening of the next day. Act III—Morning of the following day.

Wilson is just right as a romantic nurse at the institution. George Mathews is helpful as the vagabond's accomplice. Indeed, all of the performances are skillful, and so is Paul Crabtree's direction. I am told that it is fatal to call a play "heart-warming," but I have to apply the expression to "The Silver Whistle." Mr. McEnroe has provided a refreshing comedy and Mr. Ferrer makes it live and sing.

NEW YORK STAR

NOVEMBER 26, 1948

by John Lardner

'Whistle' Blows Hot and Cold

After moving off to a fast start with fifteen minutes or so of the funniest stage talk that has been heard hereabouts in some time, and a first scene that is steadily comic and appealing, *The Silver Whistle*, newest mascot of the Theatre Guild, settles down to a slower and cornier style that is apt to depress pilgrims to the Biltmore, where it made its appearance Wednesday night, as often as it entertains them.

Still and all, it will entertain them sporadically, and that, to use a tender expression I picked up from the wee people in Donegal, is better than a kick in the pants. The play's author, Robert E. McEnroe, has a lively imagination, a fine orotundity of language, and a nice eye for the ludicrous. He does not by any means realize these gifts to the full in *The Silver Whistle*. His prose and his philosophy wear extremely thin in places, and his taste is sometimes a little askew. But I would say that he is a playwright to be watched. (Myself, if I were a playwright, I would

consider it an outrage to be watched. The least we can do for Mr. McEnroe is let him decide whom he wants to be watched by.)

The author is supported with boundless energy and eloquence by his star, Jose Ferrer. Mr. Ferrer's part, of a hobo and con man with a golden tongue who exploits and then rejuvenates the inmates of a home for the aged, is an actor's picnic, but I doubt if any other actor could fare so well and richly on it as Mr. Ferrer. He is a performer in a great old tradition. He knows what ham is, but he has no fear of it. He rolls his voice and his eyes and revels in the rhetoric supplied him by Mr. McEnroe, and is unctuous, funny, and efficient all at the same time.

Personally, I am not partial to hoboos who, overstimulated by visits to public libraries, describe their progress in life as "looking beyond the next hill" and recite at random

from Shakespeare and the *Rubaiyat*. They remind me of actors playing hoboos. But the folks in the old peoples' home in *The Silver Whistle* are palpable suckers for this type, and Mr. Ferrer, as Oliver Erwerter, knocks them bowlegged when he infiltrates the home with a birth certificate he found in an ash-can which represents him to be 77 years old and gives him access to their bill of fare.

He steals their Scotch (where they got it, Mr. McEnroe does not say), feeds them phony aphorisms in the form of baker's bread, and in the end convinces them that they are just as young as they feel, which is a mighty consoling thought, and a mighty familiar one, too.

The author's wit is dry and mordant at the start. After the first scene, though, it becomes a little flyblown, and a little tasteless. Very old pauper ladies who get drunk, very old pauper gentlemen with a

yes for monkey glands, are phenomena which require the very deepest tact and understanding, and while I think Mr. McEnroe meant to provide these, there are times when he fails, and when he fails, the effect is not altogether pleasant.

There is a schism, too, in his prose style. The speeches of Mr. Ferrer often have a sound literary quality; just as often, they are thin and bogus, like the talk of a cute barfly with a pseudo-Hibernian jag on. The worst lines of the play fall to a good actor. George Mathews, a confederate of Mr. Ferrer's, in the course of burlesquing the poetic pretensions of Mr. Ferrer, from the top of a wall around the home, he emphasizes the danger to any writer of kidding his own stuff. It is apt to kid too easily and revealingly.

I admired the work of some of the actors who played the old folks, especially Doro Merande, William Lynn, and Frances Brandt. The highest praise I can pay Mr. McEnroe is to say that I envied them too, at times, the company of Mr. Ferrer, when he recited to them the best of the playwright's fancies—such as the story of the time when the hobo and the caliph's son matched life against thorns for the favors of a dancing girl in an African saloon.

"The Silver Whistle"—continued

The Sun

NOVEMBER 25, 1943

By WARD MOREHOUSE

You'll Like Oliver Erwenter.

The Theater Guild has placed a scanty but endearing comedy upon the stage of the Biltmore—a theater-piece called "The Silver Whistle," with Jose Ferrer giving the

***** performance of his career as a garrulous rogue and monte-bank who changes, and brightens, the lives of the guests of an old people's home. The first performance was played Wednesday evening.



Robert E. McEnroe, getting his first Broadway production, wrote "The Silver Whistle." He introduces us to a rolistering character in the lovable trickster, Oliver Erwenter, the tallest liar who has been around these parts since Lightning' Bill Jones drove his swarm of bees across the desert without the loss of a single bee.

***** The jaunty and voluble Oliver, wearing the rags of the road, and with a caged and famished

rooster under his arm, comes in upon the garden of a church which adjoins a home for the aged. He is posing as a septuagenarian, giving his age as 77,

and he offers a birth certificate, found in an ashcan, to prove it.

The old people forget their years and their infirmities as

they listen fascinatedly to Oscar's tales of his roaming to the far places of the world. He has sailed the China Sea and has wandered across the bleak wastes of Mongolia; he knows the steaming heat of the African jungle; he has scaled great peaks and bathed in tropical pools; he's been a glass blower and a cattle herder, and he has frequented the four dives of Cairo.

The cackling and complaining Mr. Beebe, under the spell of the adventurer and under the influence of a youth-restoring potion, tosses off twenty-five years—just like that; Mrs. Sampler, who admits being 75, becomes quite chirrupy and willing to engage in mad, mad things; the croaking Mr. Cherry recovers some of his bounce and the cynical and distrusting Mrs. Hammer, who spots Oliver for a liar the instant he opens his mouth, never misses a word he says. Eventually, the impatient Oliver is exposed as a fraud, for his own good and by his own fellow-vagrant, but when he departs, taking his rooster along, his Passing-of-the-Third-Floor-Backish visitation has been completed.

Jose Ferrer turns in a rollicking performance as the glib and philosophical wanderer. Doro Merande, who is practically everybody's favorite actress, is wry and dry and wonderful as the caustic and dubious Mrs. Hammer. There are first-rate characterizations from William Lynn, Kathleen Comegys, George Mathews, Frances Brandt, Jane Marbury and Burton Mallory. Robert Carroll is excellent as the pastor and there is attractive playing from Eleanor Wilson as the pastor's fiancée, who finds herself enthralled by the Cyrano-like wooing of the stranger with moon-drenched words. Herbert Brodskin's setting is effective; so is the direction of Paul Crabtree.

Robert McEnroe's "The Silver Whistle" is not a sturdy play—perhaps it's not actually a good play—and it runs down a bit in the middle and toward the finish, but it is a comedy with a peculiar enchantment, and it offers a swagging performance by Jose Ferrer that brings memories of the greatness of Holbrook Blinn. You'll like Oliver Erwenter. He will be brightening lives at the Biltmore for the entire season.

Journal American

NOVEMBER 25, 1943

Jose Ferrer Is Fine In an Excellent Play

By ROBERT GARLAND

With the exception of "opposite," "picaresque" is the most difficult of words to get into a newspaper. For where "opposite" is sure to come out "opposite," "picaresque" is certain to come out "picturesque."

And "picturesque" is too inadequate an adjective for the racy and romantic performance of Jose Ferrer in "The Silver Whistle" which The Theatre Guild brought to the Biltmore Thanksgiving Eve.

There is no way of telling how the Robert McEnroe comedy would be without Mr. Ferrer in the leading role. With him, however, it is almost as racy and romantic as the performance of its star. Pretending to be Oliver Erwenter who, so picaresquely, is Cyrano, Robin Hood and Wilfred Tassbinder in one, he is, to understate it, grand. Since late last Summer in Westport he has made the role his own. If, like me, you remember

what Denman Thompson was to "The Old Homestead," Joseph Jefferson was to "Rip Van Winkle," E. H. Sothern was to "If I Were King" and, only yesterday, Jose Ferrer himself was to Cyrano de Bergerac, you would have some idea of what Mr. Ferrer is to "The Silver Whistle." For, like his predecessors, he lifts the comedy over the weak spots and sees his unheroic here through.

A brilliant bravado impersonation, his played down instead of up, in the round instead of in the two-dimensional.

Interesting Tramp

This Oliver Erwenter is an always interesting, frequently intellectual and consistently disarming tramp. As possessor of the sterling blowpipe of the title, he enters the garden of a church adjoining an Old People's Home under false pretenses. Bringing Omar, his

fighting rooster with him in a cage, he settles down for bed and board, for rest and recreation in the original meaning of the word.

The bed, the board and the rest ate his for three hilarious, yet touching, days. And the recreation is bestowed upon the inhabitants of the Old People's Home. These, Messrs. Beebe and Cherry, and Mesdames Gross, Sampler and Hammer, are made over there before your eyes. By means of tall tales, short lies and a phoney magic powder, they are, for 70 all-too-fleeting hours, almost as good as new.

Nowadays, it is the fashion for a comedy to be cruel. Yet the basic inhumanity of "The Silver Whistle" is soon forgotten in the raciness and romanticism that, largely because of Jose Ferrer's intellectual and disarming bum, take over soon after the first act curtain rises. It is not troublesome again until Oliver Erwenter and the audience leave for parts unknown to both the author and the audience.

At that, the locale is a Never-Never-Land where a clergyman is a "reverend," a bishop is brighter than a pitchman, and Scotch grows on trees.

Skill and Tact

Were I running a studio for talented young performers, I would conduct my classes to the

Biltmore and have them see that under, rather than over, playing is the thing. As Oliver Erwenter into Cyrano de Bergerac into Robin Hood into Wilfred Tassbinder, Jose Ferrer unfailingly underplays. And with such skill, tact and all-over picaresqueness that the most ardent over-actor could sit and learn.

Under Paul Crabtree's rising young direction, Mr. Ferrer's surrounding players are as good as they can be. And that is good! William Lynn, Doro Merande, Frances Brandt, Kathleen Comegys, Jane Marbury and Burton Mallory are comically tragic as the inmates of the Old People's Home. As a "reverend," a bishop and a policeman, Robert Carroll, Lawrence Fletcher and Chase Soltes are what the playwright ordered.

George Mathews is happily humpty-dumpty as the Good Companion Emmett who spends his nights and days sitting on a wall. Only Omar, the fighting rooster in a cage, seems unhappy. ill at ease. So may I, as a reporter talking out of turn, suggest Black Leaf 40 for his obvious lousiness? All Stage Manager Philip Barry need do is dash, as directions say, it in among his feathers.

"The Silver Whistle" is a Thanksgiving present from The Theatre Guild for which Broadway should be thankful. And The Theatre Guild should be thankful for Jose Ferrer's picaresque performance.

DAILY NEWS

November 25, 1948

'Silver Whistle' Charming Fable Captivatingly Acted by Ferrer

By JOHN CHAPMAN

In Broadway's commercial world of boffe, whammo, socko and, on the other hand, stinko, "The Silver Whistle" is an innocent delight. It is a beguiling comedy about a hobo who livens up an old folks' retreat, in which Jose Ferrer gives this season's most captivating performance.

The Theatre Guild presented "The Silver Whistle" last evening at the Biltmore Theatre. The author is Robert E. McEnroe, and this is his first play so far as Broadway knows. For more than two acts Mr. McEnroe sustains a flight of sentimental whimsy; he writes poetically as though his hobo hero were a combination of Robin Hood and Cyrano de Bergerac; then, at the end, he runs out of invention or is in a hurry to get through.

I can forgive Mr. McEnroe his ending, which is a prosaic tidying-up of details, because of the charm

of what has gone before. "The Silver Whistle" is a kind of play of which I am shamelessly fond—a piece to which the playgoer must bring more than the price of his tickets. It takes, besides the money and the time spent sitting in a seat, a willingness to pretend—an unspoken agreement to go along with some very amiable actors in whatever they propose to do.

New Hope for the Aged.

Mr. Ferrer, the hobo, traveling with a pal named Emmett, finds in an ash can some papers identifying

a 77-year-old gent. The papers indicate that this gaffer is bound for a berth in an old folks' home maintained by and next door to a church. Since Mr. Ferrer has no place to sleep, and since his only prospect of food is an underfed rooster he carries in a cage, he decides to become 77 years old and tarry in the home a while.

He brings new life to his aged companions. He spins wondrous lies about travels and adventures; he promises love potions to despairing gaffers; like Cyrano, he makes hopeless love to a fair young maiden. With the help of his friend Emmett, who lurks on the other side of the church wall hungering for food, he steals a bird bath, a cypress tree, a gardenful of flowers, a lottery wheel and a bingo game and makes the life of

old folks worth living. He also persuades a nice but too awfully proper young minister that a little fun never hurt anybody.

Some Good Companions.

Mr. Ferrer's performance is a thing of zest, resourcefulness and grace. Mr. McEnroe has written a good deal of his play in terms of poetic imagery, and Mr. Ferrer matches his style with engaging flamboyance. Among the good companions of the old folks-home are William Lynn and Burton Mallory as two ancients who are hoping for the best; Doro Merande, Kathleen Comegys and Jane Marbury as three old gals, and George Mathews as the fellow hobo.

Eleanor Wilson is the charming young woman who falls under the hobo's spell, and Robert Carroll the minister who finally unbends. Paul Crabtree has directed the company skillfully, and I recommend for pantomime a scene in which Mr. Ferrer passes a matchbox full of love pills and a bottle of whiskey to Mr. Lynn and Mr. Mallory.

As I've said, the ending is a little hurried and prosaic; but even so I had a lovely time at "The Silver Whistle" and would like to recommend it to those who are willing to contribute a little of their own enthusiasm to an evening in the theatre.



NOVEMBER 25, 1948

'The Silver Whistle' Blows Lightly, Pipes Old Tune in a New Way

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

There used to be a popular song called "It ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it," that is peculiarly applicable to "The Silver Whistle."

No statement of the play's subject or story could convey the slightest suggestion of its quality. Because it is written and played as it is, it is entirely endearing, gay and funny often to the point of being bawdy. It is about a man who actually performs magic, yet is not a fantasy, but very realistic. It has a sound philosophy, and is poetic without flights.

There are laughs in this play every few lines. Sometimes they come in bursts, but more often they are tender, deeply sympathetic and satisfying. When you make the flat statement that it is about an old people's home, all this may sound unlikely. Perhaps it is better to say that the play is about some varied and engaging characters whom circumstances have forced to live on charity, and

who happen to be advanced in years.

Then Oliver Arrives.

Life at this Church Home was a routine affair. The rules were strict, the advantages meager, the days and nights equally dull. Everybody was listless, bored and cantankerous, except Miss Hoadley, who kept a bottle of Scotch hidden in a tree, and sailed around in deaf and dreamy elation when she was able to negotiate at all.

Then Oliver Erwenier arrived, insisting that he was 77, and free in his talk about the high living that had kept him looking young. Actually he was a middle-aged tramp with great imagination and few boring or encumbering morals. What he really wanted was to find out whether living to be over 70 was worth while.

When he met old age it was not worth much of anything. But he had the fancy to see that it could eventually be fun for him, and the invention to prove the same thing

to other people. An incorrigible story teller, he let himself in for something when he reeled off a saga about a love potion from Tibet which came by mail. This fascinated Mr. Beebe, whose eyes gleamed whenever he saw the kittenish Mrs. Sampler.

Everyone Felt Better.

When Oliver provided bread crumbs as a rejuvenator to be washed down by a swig of Miss Hoadley's liquor, everybody began to feel better. He got the crowd to eat supper out doors and reminded them about singing, then nefariously provided a bazaar so they could make some money.

He also stirred up romantic feelings in Miss Tripp, the young manager of the home, who, despite his age, found him much more glamorous than her fiance, Rev. Watson.

When a restless pal of Oliver's told the truth about him, everybody was depressed, particularly since the bazaar looked impossible as he had "borrowed" all the equipment for it.

In the end, his ideas about enterprise and appreciating what you have, proved contagious, and the people of the home took things into their own hands and very satisfactorily.

Comic and Not Cute.

There are obvious pitfalls for a play on this subject, and that is where "the way that you do it" is important. One of its great charms as entertainment is that it never asks, or even permits you to feel sorry for any of these people for a moment. On the other hand it is played for warm comic values without becoming arch or cute.

Jose Ferrer is an expert back-bone as the mendacious Oliver. His matter of factness bolsters the play with surprise at his outrageous notions. He quite takes the audience in along with his mature pals, with his tales of tropical waters or dens in Cairo, and holds sure reins on the tone of the play as this practical, modern and highly sophisticated Cyrano.

Between William Lynn's facial expressions, Doro Merande's vocal humor and Frances Brand's airy meandering, there is a real wealth of fun among the home's enrollees. Kathleen Comegys is a real belle, as Mrs. Sampler, who had three husbands, all poor.

Eleanor Wilson is engaging and simple as the attractive young manager of the home, and Robert Carroll makes a handsome sincere Reverend who is willing to learn.

"The Silver Whistle" performs a rare service these days in suggesting that tomorrow may be brighter than today.

"The Silver Whistle"—continued

NEW YORK
Herald Tribune

November 25, 1948

By HOWARD BARNES

Ferrer Hits a High Note

ROBERT E. MCENROE'S "The Silver Whistle," which the Theater Guild has mounted meticulously at the Biltmore, discusses senility with broad humor and sentiment. Set in a church garden adjoining a home for the aged, the play mixes quotations from "The Rubaiyat" with ribald references to dotage and vague profundities about the fountain of youth. Thanks to a remarkable performance by Jose Ferrer in the starring role, it takes on an engaging quality before the final curtain.

His assistants do not fail him in capitalizing on the high moments in a straggling drama. But their best efforts do not keep the production from being verbose and somewhat embarrassing.

The author has introduced a strolling pitchman into an old-folks' hospice to implement a deal of obvious action. The fellow is a fraud, of course, counting on free meals in a refuge from a gadget-conscious society. Having found that he can inspire the inmates with a new zest for living by supposed panaceas and his own sheer exuberance, he rallies them to an honest struggle for the joys of existence in the climax. The situations involve a church bazaar, a stand-still romance between a minister and a nurse in the home and some odd interruptions from a fellow pitchman delivered from

the garden wall. They are sometimes captivating, but it is because of the acting rather than the writing.

Ferrer portrays the latter-day Ponce de Leon with such complete assurance that he makes the work seem a great deal better than it is. In the most awkward moments of the script, he declaims with good humor and dramatic effect, even when he has to resort to soliloquies. He would be a tonic for the decrepit in more plausible circumstances than obtain in "The Silver Whistle." His triumph over defeatism, petty prejudice and the constabulary is a singular acting tour-de-force. While he makes much of an antic costume and facial grotesqueries, he distills what essence of quality there is in the McEnroe fable by the sheer

conviction of his impersonation. It is a delight to watch his leger-demain.

William Lynn totters at his side through much of the piece as a codger who wants to believe that he can feel younger. Doro Merande, Frances Brandt and Kathleen Comegys are first-rate as other charity residents of the home, and Robert Carroll and Eleanor Wilson, after a slow start, get considerable excitement into the subsidiary love story. George Mathews is on hand as the tramp's skeptical pal and there is a well behaved rooster in the bargain. Paul Crabtree has staged the show studiously and Herbert Brodtkin has afforded pleasant settings. "The Silver Whistle" drags, but Ferrer and the Theater Guild have made it moderately entertaining.

The New York Times

November 25, 1948

Jose Ferrer Plays a Beloved Vagabond in a Droll Comedy Put On at the Biltmore

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Having nothing cosmic in mind, Robert E. McEnroe has written a comedy about an old folks' home, "The Silver Whistle," put on by the Theatre Guild at the Biltmore last evening. This turns out to be quite a satisfactory idea. For Mr. McEnroe has an uncommonly amiable sense of humor, and he also has Jose Ferrer in the leading part. On short notice it is difficult to decide which of these two things is the more delightful; and since

they are both present in the same play, the problem is not particularly important. But Mr. Ferrer is the most able, the most stimulating and the most versatile actor of his generation in America. Cast in the part of a beloved vagabond in a dryly entertaining play, he gives a wonderful comic performance and deserves a little raucous cheering from the hustings of Broadway.

Mr. McEnroe's idea is romantic as well as comic. He introduces into a morose old folks' home a swashbuckling charlatan with the gift of gab. The charlatan is Oliver Erwin, tramp and teller of travelers' tales with literary flourishes. He dispates the boredom of the charitable asylum with his flamboyant yarns of Africa, Cairo and Mongolia. He restores the youth of the inmates by rousing their interest and by dosing them with bogus love potions made out of bread. As a final gesture of bravado he brightens the asylum gar-

den by stealing flowers, a cedar tree, a bird bath and a croquet set from neighboring property; and with the consent of the bishop and the parson he arranges a gay bazaar with wicked games of chance on church property.

What the charlatan accomplishes is founded on lies. But Mr. McEnroe is writing in the spacious, rolling tradition of Omar Khayyam, whom he quotes by the yard. When he is not quoting, he is writing purple passages on his own account, as intoxicated with words as Cyrano. In fact, "The Silver Whistle" may be too self-consciously literary. Sometimes it sounds like the jest of a clever librarian. But fortunately Mr. McEnroe never loses his sense of humor, and his comedy is, accordingly, original, friendly and fabulous.

There is a chuckle in the acting, too. William Lynn, a veteran comedian, gives an especially ingratiating performance as one of the oldsters. As a malevolent old

witch, Doro Merande is also amusing. Under Paul Crabtree's competent direction, George Mathews, Kathleen Comegys, Robert Carroll and Eleanor Wilson also bring color and contrast into a performance that is never quite far enough away from the drab. Even Herbert Brodtkin's setting is a bit on the drab side.

But Mr. Ferrer is the good genius of the occasion. What he learned in his gusty performance of "Cyrano de Bergerac" has helped to give him the latitude and ironic eloquence he brings to the part of Mr. McEnroe's disarming rogue. Mr. Ferrer is a magnetic actor with an excellent voice and an alert intelligence. As a poet of the high road and box car, he plays with a sense of rich enjoyment. There is not a dead spot in the whole range of this long and garrulous performance. There, by the grace of God, we have a good, sound, working actor.

Daily Mirror

November 25, 1948

Jose Ferrer Excellent In 'The Silver Whistle'

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Robert E. McEnroe's "The Silver Whistle," which the Theatre Guild brought to the Biltmore Theatre last evening, is one of the most unusual and arresting plays to open here in many semesters. When the curtain first rises upon it, you are apt to be just a little shocked and depressed, but as you realize what the author is up to, you become increasingly absorbed and delighted by the novelty.

"The Silver Whistle" has to do with a tramp who crashes an old folks' home with the aid of another's birth certificate, and proceeds to make its occupants forget their troubles, miseries and

loneliness with tall tales of adventure. These fascinating tales race the pulses of the oldsters and give them a zest for living.

The eloquent tramp finds time

to woo the pretty fiancé of a stodgy young rector, but by the time the tramp is exposed by a pal, the cleric has become mellowed and wiser. Not only does he win back his girl, who runs the home, but he also persuades his bishop to permit the veterans to stage a church bazaar to raise funds for the home.

The central character is one of the most attractive to grace a play in some time. His moon-struck speech, his spicy entertaining stories of high adventure, his love for life and his fondness for people makes him an engaging fellow, indeed.

The flamboyant tramp is beautifully played by Jose Ferrer, who etches him as a combination of Cyrano and Pan, reduced to tatters. This fine performance kept the audience in their seats even after the final curtain's fall. Bravo's and robust applause shook the theatre. They were well deserved.

Doro Merande, William Lynn, Frances Brandt, Kathleen Comegys, Jane Marbury and Burton Mallory are wonderful as the old folks befriended by the glib faker. Eleanor Wilson and Robert Carroll are excellent in the romantic leads. Meriting mention, too, is a brief appearance by that over-reliable first-rater, Lawrence Fletcher, as the bishop. George Mathews gives one of his less commendable performances as a snitching knight-of-the-road.

The staging by ex-actor Paul Crabtree deserves a salute. The theatre has been sadly in need of more young directors and Crabtree promises to be a welcome and capable asset. Herbert Brodtkin's set captures the mood of the piece.

It took courage for the Theatre Guild to produce "The Silver Whistle." Lawrence Langner and Theresa Helburn are to be complimented for seeing in it a rewarding, literate and heart-warming comedy hit.

"The Young and Fair"

The Sun

NOVEMBER 23, 1948

By WARD MOREHOUSE

Too Much of Everything.

The summer-theater circuit moved in upon Broadway last night with "The Young and Fair," plucked from the showshop at Falmouth, Mass., and given presentation, with

carefully selected New York players, upon the stage of the Fulton. N. Richard Nash is the author and the production is brought in by Vinton Freedley and Richard Krakeur, duck-blind companions of this department from Currituck Sound to the marshlands of Ontario.

"The Young and Fair," a play of some effective scenes, is overwrought and cluttered. An all-female piece, with its scene in a girls' junior college, it piles plot upon plot and issue upon issue, as it deals with appeasement and compromise, along with anti-semitism, kleptomania and insanity.

The new drama tells of the ruction created at the Brook Valley Academy when the spoiled and vicious daughter of an influential trustee succeeds in having an innocent girl accused of the theft of \$100 and a fountain pen. The character of Drucilla Eldridge is a hellion who brings reminders of the little monster of "The Children's Hour," but that was a better play.

Playwright Nash, in his story-telling, turns from consideration of the perils of compromise and pacification, to outright melodrama, and then he goes back again to the grief and torture that can be brought about by half measures. There are scenes here and there of genuine tension,

but there is always a little too much of everything.

Perhaps the most dramatic interlude in "The Young and Fair" is the third-act crack-up of the girl who has been in the infirmary and who has been frightened and bullied by the formidable Drucilla into charging the blameless Patty with stealing. Julie Harris, to be remembered from "Sundown Beach," turns in an extraordinary bit of acting in her confession scene. There is an interesting performance from the attractive and inexperienced Doe Avedon, who is the demoniacal Drucilla. Miss Avedon makes Drucilla seem to be too vivid and too bright to go in for all the clumsy chicanery that is her lot upon the Fulton's stage.

Frances Starr, who brings the theater's glamour to any role in which she appears, vividly projects the distress of the school founder, badgered by her trustees and a victim of her own policy of compliance and irresolution. Mercedes McCambridge is tremendously direct and forthright as a high-minded young teacher, willing to compromise only for the sake of her student sister. Patricia Kirkland is effective and just right as Patty, unappeasable and unquelled to the finish.

THE YOUNG AND FAIR.

Play by N. Richard Nash; staged by Harold Churman; setting by Paul Morrison; costumes by Eleanor Goldsmith; presented by Vinton Freedley, in association with Richard W. Krakeur, of the Fulton Theater, Monday evening, November 23, 1948. The cast:

Emory Foster.....Frieda Altman
Frances Merrill.....Mercedes McCambridge
Patty Morrill.....Patricia Kirkland
Sara Canby.....Frances Starr
Laura Canby.....Betty Marjessy
Lee Barron.....Lois Wheeler
Solma Kasey.....Louisa Polaron
Nancy Gear.....Julia Harris
Neil Chavoor.....Frances Freeman
Drucilla Eldridge.....Doe Avedon
Mary Louisa.....Patricia Bouchard
Sybil.....Peggy O'Connor
Betsy.....Ann Borg
Helen.....Vicki Carlson
Gloria.....Rita Gam
Bess.....Ann Murphy
Mathilda.....Blaine Bradford
Berta McGregor.....Betsy Moffat
Georgina.....Mary Lou Polan
Pauline.....Lee Truitt
Carol.....Betsy Stanley

SYNOPSIS: The action of the play takes place in the Brook Valley Academy, a girls' junior college not far from Boston.

"The Young and Fair," well directed by Harold Churman, is by no means a tiresome play but it is one that never holds to any course; it is better in incidental scenes than it is as a whole. The author's principal fault has been that of overwriting.

Journal American

NOVEMBER 23, 1948

Not the Melodrama Broadway Needs

By ROBERT GARLAND

With almost every other thing agreeably on hand, what Broadway has been in need of is a melodrama. What Broadway got last evening at the Fulton was a melodrama. But, unless I am more mistaken than is my all-too-fallible custom, the melodrama Broadway got is not the melodrama of which it has been in need.

Even so, Vinton Freedley, along with Richard W. Krakeur, has presented a melodrama entitled "The Young and Fair." The author is N. Richard Nash. N. Richard Nash is also the author of "Second Best Bed" which with Ruth Chatterton in what was practically the title role, scandalized William Shakespeare two years ago.

Now, in "The Young and Fair," N. Richard Nash has written a better play than the play in

which, in the June of 1946 and at the Ethel Barrymore, one Richard Thomsen confused the so-called Bard of Aven with the well known Swan. But, in spite of this and a fine production, it is still not the melodrama Broadway needs.

In that fine production, the cast is as good as flawless, the setting by Paul Morrison is excellent and the costumes by Eleanor Goldsmith are fitting. But the direction of Harold Churman is overwrought. And studio-ish. I was about to add. And will add, even if I must coin the word. Studio-Greupish could be what I really mean.

A Girls' School

This time, instead of Stratford-on-Avon, N. Richard Nash has chosen the Brook Valley Academy, a girls' junior college not far from

Boston, as the setting of his play. Against this background he has placed a light-fingered young lady, an uncalled-for touch of anti-Semitism and a dash of Sigmund Freud.

Upstairs, downstairs, in Patricia Morrill's chamber, nineteen shrill and adolescent schoolgirls traipse back and forth, either looking for the light-fingered one or blaming her handiwork on each other. As they do so, the head mistress, the personnel officer and the maid look on. Finally, they, too, are in the mixup.

For a while, this new setting for an old theatrical contrivance is not without effectiveness. The sneak-thief, who turns out to be a kleptomaniac, in a girls' junior college, with anti-Semitism, and Sigmund Freud thrown in, provides an early-in-the-evening pliancy. But it does wear thin before the play is over.

To this, N. Richard Nash—whose initialed name fascinates me!—has added (I quote) certain aspects of moral compromise in the contemporary world (unquote). In other words, he asks himself and his congregation: Is white really white, is black really black, and is grey an immoral, unsocial color?

Deserved Ovation

At the head of the cast, Frances

Starr returns as Sara Canby, grey-minded head-mistress of Brook Valley Academy. Hers was a well deserved ovation. As her friend and personnel officer, Mercedes McCambridge is pretty generally believable. Her Frances Morrill is of a wavering, one-track mind.

But not Frances Morrill's sister, Patty. Not as devised by Patricia Kirkland. The rock-bound forthrightness of Miss Kirkland's Patty Morrill may be the fundamental weakness of "The Young and Fair." Nobody, not even a playwright, could pretend to pin the college kleptomania on her. Yet N. Richard Nash does!

In a high-pitched last act scene, Julie Harris takes over as the light-fingered young lady, pursued by anti-Semitism and Sigmund Freud. She also took the first-night customers by storm. Consequently, Lois Wheeler's Lee Barron, and Doe Avedon's Drucilla Eldridge failed to come into their own.

Everything has been done by Vinton Freedley and Richard W. Krakeur, to make N. Richard Nash's "The Young and Fair" seem better than it is. For a while, it almost fools you. But, as the impact of the production thins, the contrivance of the playwright shows through. In a melodrama, this must not be!

NOVEMBER 23, 1948

'The Young and Fair' Are Rather A Dull Lot of Junior College Girls

By JOHN CHAPMAN

There is a certain similarity of dramatic intent, but not of impact, between N. Richard Nash's "The Young and Fair" and Lillian Hellman's "The Children's Hour." Mr. Nash's play was presented last evening at the Fulton Theatre; Miss Hellman's came to Maxine Elliott's 14 years ago. Miss Hellman still is the winner, for she wrote in bold, taut scenes. The best I can report for Mr. Nash is that he has approached his subject with more sincerity than skill.

As it was in the older play—and as it is, indeed, in Fay Kanin's "Goodbye, My Fancy"—the subject is a school for young females. In

Mr. Nash's junior college for well-born wenches a kleptomaniac is loose. Also loose—or at least being given too much freedom—is a student who is as politically and personally ruthless as the late Hitler.

The poisonous young lady of "The Young and Fair" is not as heroic a hellion as was the evil little gossip in Miss Hellman's play who drove one teacher to suicide.

All she does in her nasty way is to pin the dormitory thievery on an innocent girl when she knows who the real thief is. And in the process this young lady—quite well played by Doe Avedon—is forced by the author to recite some rather dreadful lines. One that I made note of goes, "It's her against me. She's got to leave this place or I've got to." I just don't believe junior college girls talk like that.

Those Trustees Again.

Headmistress of Mr. Nash's school in "The Young and Fair" is Frances Starr. Miss Starr, returning to the stage after some years, finds herself beset by prob-

lems of administration and survival. Like the college president in "Goodbye, My Fancy," she must knuckle down to trustees or lose her job. I am now convinced that a trustee makes a very unsatisfactory villain, particularly when he is not seen upon the stage.

Miss Starr's portrayal of a worried woman is all right but not particularly exciting. Last evening young Julie Harris ran off with most of the applause in the role of the kleptomaniac—a mousy little girl who is ill rather than dishonest, and who has one hysterical scene of confession. Mercedes McCambridge, Patricia Kirkland and Lois Wheeler are others of the company who perform dutifully and attractively under the direction of Harold Clurman.

Paul Morrison has designed a setting on three levels indicating a school bedroom, a lobby and Miss Starr's office. It works well for instantaneous changes of scene, but it is acoustically difficult.

I think I am supposed to take "The Young and Fair" quite seriously as a drama and to count it as important. I wish I could, for author, producers, director and players have done so. But I can't.

NEW YORK STAR

NOVEMBER 24, 1948

by John Lardner

A Case of Bobby-sox Fascism

The junior college for girls inspected by N. Richard Nash in his play *The Young and Fair*, which arrived at the Fulton Monday night, is as pure a little well of poison as you are apt to find on this green footstool, and the audience's sympathy goes out to Frances Starr, headmistress of the place, when she says with a sigh, in the last act, "I'm no longer equal to my burden."

Bobby-sox fascism is rife in the school, which goes by the name of Brook Valley Academy. Campus activities include espionage, blackmail, criminal conspiracy, Jew-baiting, theft, and perjury, as well as field hockey and appreciation of arts. There is also a special private course, set up by the student body, in plain and fancy vigilantism, administered by a girl-on-horseback whose father is president of the National Steel Company and a trustee of the school.

Miss Starr is not only burdened

by this state of affairs, she is a party to it, through her tolerance of evil. Like most of the other would-be liberals in the play, she is caught in her separate little web of compromise with reaction. For the sake of comfort and safety, the headmistress compounds one felony after another until her ideals are diluted beyond hope of repair.

Her plight—which is shared in some degree or other by all "good" characters—is the principal theme of *The Young and Fair*. It's a serious, honest theme entitled to serious attention. It is written so sincerely in this case, and understood so well by four or five of the most gifted members of the all-female cast, that some of the scenes at the Fulton have a real emotional intensity highly unusual—to date, anyway—in this limp and synthetic Broadway season.

But—well, I'm afraid that in the main, the "but's" have it. The bulk of Mr. Nash's writing is banal and

muddy. His enthusiasm sometimes leads him, as enthusiasm clumsily handled is likely to do, to the borderline of unintentional humor. Also, by smearing the forces of wrongdoing a bit too thickly with black shoe-polish, he puts your credulity to a rough test and tortures the laws of probability out of shape.

I can hardly deny that ku-kluxism and larceny may, in certain circumstances, infest even a girl's school in the neighborhood of Boston, especially when the mistress of same is having a hard time to make ends meet. But Mr. Nash, in *The Young and Fair*, falls into the easy and dangerous artistic weakness of writing in coal-black and snow-white. His error is also that of one of his characters, a young girl (played by Patricia Kirkland, daughter of Nancy Carroll) who takes a strictly black-and-white view of things. On her, it doesn't look bad. Oversimplifying is some-

thing a child idealist can get away with when an adult playwright can't.

To make a true, convincing picture of latent fascism as it exists nearly everywhere, in schools as well as in governments, it seems to me you must take into account that most of the people you are dealing with are ostensibly bad and good in a ratio nearer 52-48 than 90-10, that they are very plausible human beings in the world's eyes as well as in their own. Admittedly, Mr. Nash is treating of evil which has passed from a latent to an active stage. Here, more than ever, the people and the situations must be recognizable and representative, rather than grotesque. Hitlers ought to conform to their background, and a Munich beerhall-type Hitler looks all wrong in a junior college in Massachusetts.

To do him justice, Mr. Nash does seem to have convinced his actresses of the validity of *The Young and Fair*. The cast gives its best without reserve, especially the younger members, including Miss Kirkland, Julie Harris, Doe Avedon, and Lois Wheeler. I thought Miss Wheeler, playing a Jewish girl passing as Protestant at Brook Valley Academy, did one of the most attractive jobs of acting of the year Monday night.

"The Young and Fair"—continued

New York Post

NOVEMBER 23, 1943

Skulduggery and Evil In a Girls' College

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

One of the leading characters in "The Young and Fair" is a well-meaning lady who, years before, had started a girls' junior college in the hope of being of service to American womanhood. According to the evidence in the new play, which came to the Fulton last night, she would have been better advised if she had opened a saloon, a gambling house, or a brothel. Certainly such places could hardly have been the scene of more anti-social activities than Brook Valley Academy in N. Richard Nash's overwrought, plot-heavy, frantic, but well acted and far from boring melodrama.

The author is obviously concerned with more serious matters than the kleptomania and

the reign of terror conducted by a venomous student against those who dare oppose her, which provide him with his somewhat excessive narrative. He is interested in contemplating such important social issues as incipient youthful Fascism, anti-Semitism, the effect on the young of parental ruthlessness and lack of feeling, the evils of compromising with wrong, and the failure of fashionable schools to make their students tolerant and understanding. But he is also preoccupied with his melodrama.

A Lot of Plot

In fact, I am afraid that he has so much highly-colored plot to offer that he hasn't much time left to probe into the social issues with any insight or to make his characters three-dimensional. There is the neurotic girl who steals money and jewelry, and the evil Fascist-minded girl who frames a student who refuses to be bullied by her, and the headmistress who attempts to appease a rich trustee by blaming the thefts on an innocent servant, and the young teacher who tries

to compromise with wrong-doing until she finally comes to revolt. Between them, they provide so much narrative that they clutter up the evening.

It is tense and lively melodrama, with considerable suspense, and, as I have said, it certainly never gets boring. At the same time, it is also piled on so heavily that it is never quite plausible. I couldn't believe, for example, that the horrible young villainess, who is supposed to be at least an intelligent girl, would have thought it possible to get away with her obvious and easily-exposed framing of the nice ingenu. And, while I am willing to accept that there are tall goings-on in girls' schools, I hardly credited the mass of conniving, cowardice and skulduggery that made Brook Valley such a nest of melodramatic vipers. It is rather fun to watch, though.

Villainous Miss Avedon

The role of the nasty girl dictator, the most sinister young woman the stage has seen since Mary Anderson acted that little

monster in "Guest in the House," is strikingly played by a vivid and exciting newcomer named Doe Avedon. I would say that the handsome Miss Avedon has the making of an exceptionally interesting actress, save that I read in the program that she is already under contract to David Selznick, who is training her for a movie career. It seems to me a great pity, because she has a dynamic stage quality.

The all-female cast is an excellent one throughout. The illustrious veteran, Frances Starr, as the beaten head-mistress, and Mercedes McCambridge, as the finally rebellious teacher, are fine in the more mature roles, while Patricia Kirkland as the victim of the frame-up, Lois Wheeler as the tormented Jewish student, and Julie Harris, who can handle an emotional scene impressively, as a hapless neurotic, show that they are among the best of our younger actresses. Harold Clurman directed incisively. "The Young and Fair" has some of the melodramatic excitement of "The Children's Hour" without its credibility and skill.

New York World-Telegram

NOVEMBER 23, 1943

'The Young and Fair' Tightly Spun Drama

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Using the instrument of a girls' junior college, "The Young and Fair" peruses and defines some universal principles in a tightly spun drama at the Fulton Theater. The struggle between honesty and practical compromise is studied in its effect on a wide range of characters, from an aging headmistress, deeply involved in protecting her school, to a blindly honorable youngster whose sister calls her "all justice and no understanding."

The girl, Patty, comes as a student with her older sister, who will teach and manage personnel. In various ways the characters are pitted against a frighteningly cold-blooded rich girl, who believes she can buy anything in life.

She is Drucilla, whose authoritarian instincts stop at nothing, and she has the insurance of being the child of a wealthy member of the school's board of trustees. As her operations grow more involved we see Miss Cantrey, the headmistress, get deeper and deeper into a web of deceptions, as she tries desperately to keep in the good graces of the girl's father.

Into a Stone Wall

Young Patty walks squarely into one stone wall after another with her childlike clarity, and her sister sways one way and then the other trying to preserve her integrity and reconcile it with the obvious necessity of playing along with Miss Cantrey.

The teacher, Frances, disciplines

Drucilla, for contravening an issue the students have settled by vote. Drucilla determines to have both sisters dismissed, and produces convincing evidence that Patty is stealing certain things the other girls have missed. She terrifies the actually guilty girl, who is a mental case, into corroborating her charge, and forces Patty's roommate to support it by threatening to reveal the fact that she had lied about being Jewish when she entered the school.

Eventually the truth is brought out. The play's resolution does not particularly concern itself with the punishment of the guilty girl. Skillfully it directs the interest to the other characters' recapitulation of their own decisions, a search of their own motives, and a conclusion of how they must act to achieve future contentment. Only for Miss Cantrey is it too late.

Many Tense Scenes

There is power and provocative good sense in this play. The characterizations have honesty and dimensions, and there are numerous tense scenes extremely well played under the stimulating direction of Harold Clurman. On the debit side, it starts slowly and except for a brief moment of Patricia Bouchard's, is devoid of any numerous relief. Its denouement is not too strongly motivated, but this slack is taken up

by the vital and moving performance of Julie Harris, whose distressing hysteria in the guilty youngster's confession stopped the performance dead in its tracks last night for a solid, spontaneous round of applause.

Roles Well Cast

Frances Starr brings grace and a delicate elegance to her role as the headmistress who finds her attempts to compromise have defeated her life's purpose.

Mercedes McCambridge does a stalwart job of making the pusillid young teacher straightforward and believable, and Patricia Kirkland has the feel of pristine dedication for Patty who goes through life with all banners flying.

As the Jewish girl, Lois Wheeler preserves a tremulous warmth that is always touching without self-pity, sustaining the character's easiness, hesitance and wisdom. Doe Avedon is consistently cool and cavalier as the predatory Drucilla.

The play inevitably recalls "The Children's Hour," and while it does not approach that work's taut pattern, "The Young and Fair" has more general application in its theme. There is an interesting production scheme designed by Paul Morrison, which reveals at once three separate sections of the school, each distinct yet believably related as parts of the same building.